Martin Roberts

AP English Literature and Composition

May 10, 2009

The Good Life

**Introduction**

An average day for me consists of waking up to the early sound of my screaming alarm at around six-fifteen every day for school. After a hard day’s work at school, I eat, lift, and then spend the rest of my night doing homework. I do this Monday through Friday, and I get a little break over the weekend. My family’s income status would be somewhere in the middle class range, which would not be considered considerably wealthy. I will be the first person to admit that I love my life, and I would not change it for the world; I would most definitely not change anything for money. I am comfortable and content with my life.

What defines a successful and happy lifestyle? Successful businesses, top executive positions, six-figure salaries, multi-million dollar homes, and enormous families appear to characterize the ideal lifestyle of self-gratitude and grand achievements. According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, happiness is a state of well being and contentment; a pleasurable or satisfying experience. Working ten to twelve hours a day through some of the most stressful jobs in the world while trying to raise a family by being a good husband and father sounds typical for an American. When business and money become life, a person misses the opportunity to live: Being a husband and father develops into a horrible habit of absence. Can money buy happiness?

Michael Gates Gill wrote the book entitled, *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else*. This book is a self-narrated synopsis of the struggles and hardships he faced along with his accomplishments and achievements. Throughout Gill’s book, he illustrates many real life situations in which depression and gloominess early in life transforms into cheerfulness and optimism later in life. In a brief interview, Gill discusses his previous life and expresses how the change has had a major impact on his life (Interview). The story of his life is successful in constructing an argument because there is no better truth than living the truth. Money cannot buy happiness, and material possessions and expensive accessories do not define true success.

**Gill’s Background**

Michael Gates Gill was a successful man in the business world, but not so much throughout the majority of his life. He grew up into a wealthy family, and he had great opportunity for success. Gill is a well-educated man, for he graduated from Yale, which is an Ivy League College. Just out of school, he was offered a job as creative director at a major advertising company known as J. Walter Thompson Adverting, JWT for abbreviation. He worked at this business for more than twenty-five years. Michael Gates Gill was a businessman who “received promotions early and often, moving from copywriter to creative director and executive vice president on a host of major accounts, including Ford, Burger King, Christian Dior, the United States Marine Corps, and IBM” (Gill 6). With Gill’s extensive knowledge and work experience, Gill certainly posses the qualifications to compose a story based on his life.

Dealing with the writing portion of Gill’s life, experience becomes an important factor that enables him to be established as a “creditable” author. He has written other books, including *Fire Up! : From Corporate Kiss-off to Entrepreneurial Kick-off: Take Charge of Your Destiny in Downsizing the World* and *Fired Up! : The Proven Principles of Successful Entrepreneurs*. Even though Michael Gates Gill is not a writer by trade like his father, Brendan Gill of the New Yorker, he does have some writing experience. Brendan Gill, who was a *New Yorker* writer, is Michael Gill’s father. As Gill grew up, his father was “the big man in town.” As a young man, Michael Gates Gill met and spent time with a few famous authors such as Ernest Hemmingway and Ezra Pound. Gill’s father and these people gave him knowledge and skill in writing.

**The Argument**

After Michael Gates Gill graduated from Yale and picked up a job at JWT Advertising, he believed he had it all. Living in Bronxville, New York, Gill had a wife and kids, huge mansion home including a full library, and a six-figure salary. Sadly, this is where his life takes a turn for the worst, and it is the point where Gill outwardly confesses his true unhappiness and self-pity.

Gill’s job as creative director hurt his family life. At any time during the day, week, or month, Gill “had no trouble uprooting [his] growing family” because moving frequently was a necessity (Gill 6). Like many ‘successful’ executives, Michael Gill’s employment became his top priority. Under these conditions, Gill feels extremely lost and miserable because of everything he had to miss while his children grew up. Gill states things like, “[m]y clients became my children” and “[w]as that really my pudgy baby, Annie, now a beautiful young woman graduating from *high school?* It brought tears to my eyes” (Gill 7). While Gill was too busy for his children, they grew up in the blink of an eye, and he missed *everything*. After reading the entire book, he made an inspiration statement: “*You only live one life; take it from me, live it wisely. Weigh your priorities*” (Gill 29). This expression gives new meaning for the way people should live their lives.

Twenty-five years down the road, with children grown and a lifetime of missed memories, Michael Gates Gill receives that call that nobody wants to get. One of the associates from JWT pulled the plug, and she left Gill jobless. After pouring his heart and soul into the company, he loses his job, which drives him into further depression. Gill is clearly not content with his home life, so he meets this girl names Susan, with whom he has another child. Gill says that he “had always counted on sex as a joyous release. Now it was one more sign of my seemingly irreversible decline” (Gill 25). Gill wasted twenty-five years of his life by putting his job first, missed everything throughout his children’s lives, lost his job, had an affair, and is about to become divorced. This is what happens when work, money, and power become the focus of a person’s life. People imagined Gill as “a man at the top of America, fulfilled, productive, successful, and happy.” Instead, he was “an insecure little boy not that good at dealing with reality (Gill 29). In the beginning of the book, that was how Gill described himself.

Just when Gill was about to give up all hope in life, he found himself sitting at a Starbucks store, and a woman sitting near him asking if he would like a job. Little did the poor, selfish, no family Michael Gates Gill realize that this job would change his life forever. The employers name was Crystal. At his Starbucks job, the arrogant Michael Gates Gill learns the value of hard work, what it truly means to demonstrate respect towards someone, and the true meaning of happiness.

Gill says that he “had noticed that even from the first day [he] stepped through the door at Starbucks, [he] had also been treated with respect” (Gill 83). Nobody ever enforced this concept of respect at JWT because respect would reveal weakness in authority. The meaning of respect was complicated for Gill to comprehend at first, but he eventually got the idea. This newly developed respect lead to positive outcomes, for example, his children were reunited with him, and in turn they gained some respect toward their father after all those years.

Michael Gates Gill was now a poor old man, of sixty-five years in age, living in a small apartment with no wife or children, but he does have a job, at Starbucks. One day, on his way to work, Gill “stopped with a shock of revelation: ‘I am happier than I have ever been.’” Gill felt an inner happiness he had never felt before in his life, until now. He says he was “almost scared; still afraid to admit to myself how happy I was now. I had hated large swatches of my former, high-status life, full of so much meaningless activity” (Gill 205). Michael Gates Gill admits here that his former life was just full of wasteful activity.

Even though Michael Gill moved from his former high-status job as an executive at JWT, being the barista at Starbucks saved his life by teaching him the moral values of respect and humility, along with finding that inner happiness that could never emerge while *business* was his number one priority. In an interview, Joel Childers asked Gill if he could elaborate more on measures of success, and Gill replied saying that “What I realized through losing all of that, is that it is not the external measures of success that bring happiness” (Childers). Michael Gates Gill is trying to inform readers that money cannot by happiness, while riches and material possessions do not lead to true success.

**The Counterargument**

The life story of Michael Gates Gill is tragic, yet uplifting at the same time, but this type of fairytale does not necessarily apply to everyone in his same situation. Does money buy happiness? According to John Silveira, riches do buy happiness. Silveira uses all kinds of support to exhibit this idea. First, the rich are more optimistic throughout their life, which leads to happier lifestyles. Certain medical studies show that the people with more income tend to live longer for they are able to afford more health care (Silveira). Silveira’s counterargument is strong because he pulls together physical evidence to back up his case.

Silveira accounts for a “Whitehall Survey, conducted at University College London,” where

17,000 civil servants have been followed. All are well educated and have the same access to health care. Yet the clerks at the bottom of the income scale have triple the mortality rate as those at the top. A U.S. study involving 300,000 men, called the Multiple Risk Intervention Factor, discovered every income class was healthier than the classes below them and sicker than the ones above. (Silveira)

Silveira uses these surveys and medical evidence as well as others to illustrate that the wealthier classes of people are generally healthier; however, the healthier lifestyle a person lives does not explicitly imply that these people are either happy, successful, or both.

Mark Cancellieri often informs people that if they want to be rich, they must live “below their means and save diligently” (Cancellieri). Upon stating this, he often gets responses such as, “money doesn’t buy happiness. I would rather be happy than wealthy” (Cancellieri). Cancellieri explains this by saying that people use this as an excuse to spend their money rather than save it because spending will make them happier. Mark Cancellieri makes an excellent statement when he says, “money is neutral. Money buys you happiness in direct proportion to how much you value what you get in return” (Cancellieri). He makes clear that money can be neither good nor evil, but it is a force for good or a force for evil.

Cancellieri attempts to inform readers that money can buy happiness, but there is no concrete answer as to whether it does or does not buy happiness. His argument proves a very valid point, but still does not override the fact that wealth cannot purchase success and happiness. His article focuses mainly with the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ sides of money, and does not contradict Gill’s life story.

**Conclusion**

Michael Gates Gill makes an effective argument because he uses his life story to express how no riches in the world lead a person to a successful and content lifestyle. All that you need to live a successful and self-fulfilled way of life, one similar to Gills, is the discipline of self and general respect, hard work, and an occupation that you truly enjoy. I agree with Gill for having wealth is comparable to having nothing at all; I would much rather live as a poor man with everything then a rich man with nothing.

Works Cited

Cancellieri, Mark. "Money Doesn't Buy Happiness, Or Does It?.” Rational Wealth. 2008. 6 May 2009 <<http://www.rationalwealth.net/blog/2008/06/02/money-doesnt-buy-happiness-or-does-it/>>.

Childers, Joel. "Q&A with Michael Gates Gill.” DailyWildCat.com. 2008. College Publisher. 6 May 2009 <<http://media.wildcat.arizona.edu/media/storage/paper997/news/2008/09/11/News/Qa.With.Michael.Gates.Gill-3425825.shtml>>.

Gill, Michael G. How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else. New York: Penguin Group (USA) INC, 2007. 1-265.

Gill, Michael G. Interview. "From Ad Man to Barista.” NYT Video. 2007. New York Times. 6 May 2009 <<http://video.nytimes.com/video/2007/09/12/garden/1194817091755/from-ad-man-to-barista.html>>.

Silveira, John. "Money Can Buy Happiness.” Backwoods Home Magazine. Oliver Del Signore. 3 May 2009 <<http://www.backwoodshome.com/articles2/silveira72lw.html>>.

